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TASK FORCE MOOTS NATL MISSION TO PROMOTE THE AVGC SECTOR

In a bid to promote audio visual, gaming and comic education, a government panel has suggested UG and PG courses on AVGC

PROPOSES 'CREATE IN INDIA' CAMPAIGN

The AVGC task force, chaired by Apurva Chandra, secretary, ministry of information and broadcasting, has also recommended to the government to launch a National AVGC-XR Mission with a budget outlay for integrated promotion of the sector and a 'Create in India' campaign on the lines of 'Make in India' with an exclusive focus on content creation

SECTOR GROWING AT 16% YEAR-ON-YEAR

- XR refers to Extended Reality, an umbrella term used to describe immersive technologies that can merge the physical and virtual worlds. The task force was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech this year to promote the AVGC sector, which has been growing at 16% year-on-year

20 lakh

THE AVGC SECTOR HAS THE POTENTIAL TO CREATE THAT MANY JOBS IN NEXT 10 YRS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Masks at gatherings must, NY events till 1 am

Karnataka to up booster vaxx drive, increase coverage from 21% to 50% by January

AKNISREE KARTHIK @ Bengaluru

IN the backdrop of rising Covid-19 cases in some countries, the Karnataka Health Department on Monday issued guidelines mandating people to wear masks at all indoor events and outdoor New Year celebrations. The department also decided to allow New Year celebrations only till 1 am.

Revenue Minister R Ashoka, who is also the vice-chairperson of the State Disaster Management Committee, convened a meeting on Covid-19 preparedness in the state, which was attended by Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar. "Karnataka has been proactive in handling Covid-19 cases. We have directed hospitals to be ready by stocking up medicine and oxygen plants to handle any resurgence in Covid-19 cases", Ashoka said after the meeting in Belagavi on Monday.

Dr Sudhakar said that 2 per cent random testing of international passengers will be done at Bengaluru and Mangaluru airports. The health minister said that the BF7 variant that is causing the surge in China was detected a year ago in India and requested the public not to panic.

He said that booster dose vaccination drive will be accelerated so that the coverage improves from the existing 21 per cent to 50 per cent by January.

As per the guidelines, those above 60 years of age and having comorbidities, and pregnant and lactating women have been advised to avoid large gatherings. The government decided to allow people entry at gatherings only after thermal screening. Those with fever and respiratory symptoms will be referred to seek medical consultation.

Also, the international passengers arriving in Bengaluru and Mangaluru airports who are symptomatic, will be taken to Bowring Hospital in Bengaluru and Wenlock Hospital in Mangaluru or the nearest private hospital for quarantine and treatment. International passengers who give sample for RT-PCR test have been asked to remain under home-quarantine till the result is out or get admitted to the designated medical facility (government or private) if they develop symptoms. If the result is positive and the patient is symptomatic, he/she will be shifted to a designated medical facility.

Samples of passengers sent for sequencing

Samples of 12 international passengers, who tested positive during screening at Kempegowda International Airport, have been sent for genomic sequencing, whose results are expected after a week or so. This includes the sample of a passenger who had arrived from China. P3

Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar and Revenue Minister R Ashoka visit Belagavi Medical College and Hospital, to review Covid measures on Monday | EXPRESS

GUIDELINES TO STAY SAFE

- Those symptomatic at B'luru and M'luru airports to be hospitalised
- Travellers, whose samples are taken for RT-PCR, to home-quarantine
- Asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic tested +ve to be on home isolation
- Moderately and severely symptomatic to be shifted to medical facilities
- Children under 12 should follow the same guidelines as adults
- New Year celebrations permitted till 1 am
- Large gatherings to be outdoors, while indoor gatherings as prescribed
- Elderly, comorbids, pregnant & lactating women to avoid New Year gatherings
- Organisers, managers, staff at hotels to be fully-vaccinated
- Masks mandatory indoors and outdoors
- Thermal screening for all entering malls, theatres etc
- N-95 mask mandatory in theatres
- No Mask-No Entry boards to be prominently displayed

2% random sampling of all international arrivals

We will have to bring in preventive measures step by step, without hampering normal life and economic activities in any way

– Basavaraj Bommai, Chief Minister

China passenger sends BBMP into a tizzy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE news of a transit passenger from China arriving in Bengaluru, who had reportedly tested positive for Covid-19, sent the government and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) officials into a tizzy. The passenger landed at Bengaluru airport and then flew to Agra.

On Monday morning, BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girnath said that details of the passenger testing positive for Covid-19 were awaited. As the day progressed, the BBMP and the State Health Department held a series of meetings through the day to ascertain more details.

Dr KV Thrilok Chandra, BBMP Special Commissioner, Health, said that the person who tested positive in Agra was a transit passenger at Bengaluru airport. He said that BBMP has sought more details from the airport authorities about the passenger. In the meantime, BBMP officials said that on December 10, a Bengalurean who had returned from Hong Kong was tested positive for Covid. Chandra said that his samples have been sent for genome sequencing and reports are awaited. P3,5

KARNATAKA COVID CASES New cases: 23 | Tests : 1,329 | TPR: 1.05% | Cured Total : 40,30,285 | Tests Total 6,96,55,858
Deaths : 0 | Active: 1,229 | Death total : 40,265

ZELENSKYY CALLS MODI, SEEKS HELP IN PEACE PUSH

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

A day after Russian President Vladimir Putin said he was ready for talks with Ukraine, its President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the phone and sought India's help for restoring peace.

"I had a phone call with PM Modi and wished a successful G20 presidency. It was on this platform that I announced the peace formula and now I count on India's participation in its implementation. I also thanked for humanitarian aid and support in the UN," Zelenskyy later tweeted. The call came days after Modi spoke to Putin.

Narendra Modi

Volodomyr Zelenskyy

Modi reiterated his call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and said both Russia and Ukraine should revert to dialogue and diplomacy. "Modi also conveyed India's support for any peace efforts and assured India's commitment to continue providing humanitarian assistance to the affected civilian population," the foreign office said.

While both sides want an exit from war, whether it will happen anytime soon is uncertain. For, Putin and Zelenskyy have preconditions that are not acceptable to each other.

"The fact is that we do not have a clear picture of the political, military and economic situation on the ground," said former Ambassador to Russia, P S Raghavan.

Ukraine foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said his government is aiming to have a peace summit by February-end, preferably at the UN with secretary general Antonio Guterres as possible mediator. As for US President Joe Biden, he said it was up to Zelenskyy on how he wanted the war to end.

Modi also spoke about the priorities of India's G20 presidency, including giving a voice to the concerns of developing nations. He requested Ukraine to facilitate arrangements for the continued education of Indian students who had returned home earlier this year.

RAIL PROJECTS

Corruption case against Lalu reopened

AMIT MUKHERJEE & RAMASHANKAR @ New Delhi/Patna

THE CBI is taking a fresh look at its probe against RJD chief and former Bihar CM Lalu Prasad Yadav in a railway projects allocation bribery case, investigations into which were stalled last year due lack of sufficient evidence.

Lalu is at present recuperating in a Singapore hospital following kidney transplant.

The matter dates back to the time when Lalu held the railways portfolio in the UPA-I government. It is being reexamined in the wake of a chargesheet filed by the CBI in October last against Lalu, his wife Rabri and 14 others in an alleged land-for-jobs scam.

Lalu is alleged to have received a south Delhi property as bribe from real estate major DLF Group, which was interested in rail land lease projects in Mumbai's Bandra and the revamp of the New Delhi railway station.

The property was allegedly bought by a DLF-funded shell company AB Exports for ₹5 crore against the then market rate of ₹30 crore. AB Exports was then allegedly bought by Lalu's son Tejashwi, now deputy CM of Bihar, and daughters Chanda and Ragini, for a mere ₹4 lakh by a transfer of shares, giving them ownership of the south Delhi bungalow.

Bihar RJD chief Jagdanand Singh said the BJP was trying to frame Lalu by reopening the case and accused it of political victimisation. State BJP V-P Mithilesh Tiwari claimed the CBI was an independent agency and was not under the influence of anybody.

'Prevent infodemic, share only verified info'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

AT a time when a section of medical experts have expressed doubts over the need for the government's heightened efforts to prevent yet another Covid wave in light of the highly transmissible BF.7 variant, Union health minister **Mansukh Mandaviya** on Monday warned against an 'infodemic'. He urged healthcare professionals to rely on only authentic and verified information.

"The Ministry has been sharing information on various aspects of Covid prevention and management," he said while virtually interacting with about 100 doctors from across the country and members of Indian Medical Association.

Meanwhile, India saw a single-day rise of 196 new infections, while the active cases increased to 3,428, according to latest data.

On Monday, four international tourists — two each from Myanmar and Bangkok — tested positive in Bihar. Following this, the state government sealed the hotels in which the tourists were staying as a precautionary measure.

In Bengal, two persons, including a British national, tested positive at the Kolkata airport. The Britisher is kept in isolation but the Indian, who returned from Bangkok, managed to slip away and is reportedly missing.

The Centre has asked all states to hold a mock drill on Tuesday to check the preparedness of their health facilities to deal with any spurt in infections. Cautious authorities have already started encouraging the use of masks with Karnataka making it mandatory in schools, colleges and at places where crowds gather for New Year celebrations.

Keep knives sharpened at home: Pragya to Hindus

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Shivamogga

BJP MP from Madhya Pradesh Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur stoked a controversy by asking Hindus to keep knives sharpened at home to use them against those who attack them. She was addressing a convention of Hindu Jagarana Vedike in Shivamogga on Sunday.

"Hindus have the right to respond to those who attack them and their dignity," she said. "They have a tradition of jihad and if nothing else, they do love jihad. Even if they love, they do jihad in that. We (Hindus) too love, love the god ... a sanyasi loves his god," she said.

CONTINUED ON: P5

Videocon's Dhoot held in ₹3k crore loan fraud case

AMIT MUKHERJEE @ New Delhi

THE CBI on Monday arrested Videocon group founder Venugopal Dhoot, 71, in connection with a loan fraud case in which former ICICI Bank MD & CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband Deepak are already in the agency's custody.

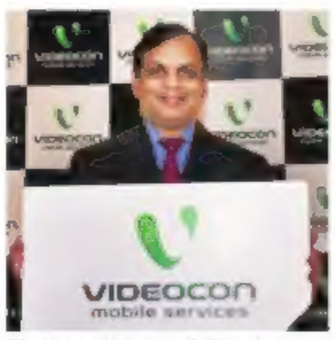
Dhoot was produced in a special court in Mumbai, which sent him to three-day CBI custody till Wednesday. The court also extended the custody of Kochhars, who were arrested on Friday after questioning, till Wednesday.

While seeking Dhoot's remand and the remand extension of the Kochhar couple, the CBI stated that the three will be confronted and questioned together.

The case is related to irregularities in ICICI Bank's loan disbursements amounting to over ₹3,000 crore to Videocon group firms between 2009 and 2011. Kochhar was charged with criminal conspiracy and cheating for the alleged irregularities in a loan extended to the Videocon group in 2012, which turned NPA.

The loan was sanctioned to the Videocon group when Chanda Kochhar was the chief of ICICI Bank. The loan was later moved to the non-performing asset (NPA), causing over ₹1,750 crore loss to the bank, according to the CBI.

The central agency alleged that when Chanda Kochhar took charge of ICICI Bank, six loans were sanctioned to various companies of the Videocon Group, out of which at least two loans were sanctioned by committees where she was a member. In other instances, she influenced the committees to sanction loans to the group, the CBI added.



File photo of Venugopal Dhoot | PTI

Dubious purchase of Mumbai flat

CBI is also probing the transfer of a Mumbai flat, owned by the Videocon group and valued around ₹5 cr, to the family trust of Kochhars at a throwaway price

EXPRESS READ

Nirmala admitted to AIIMS for viral fever

New Delhi: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on Monday with symptoms of viral fever and is recovering, sources said. Nirmala (63), is in a private ward of the hospital.

China sends 71 planes, 7 ships towards Taiwan

Taipei: China's military sent 71 planes and seven ships towards Taiwan in 24 hours, after China expressed anger at Taiwan-related provisions in a US annual defense spending bill passed on Saturday.

HC transfers poachgate probe to CBI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Hyderabad

IN what could be a shot in the arm for the BJP, a single-judge bench of the Telangana High Court on Monday ordered the transfer of the BRS MLAs poachgate case to the CBI.

However, the judge put the order on hold at the request of Advocate General B S Prasad to enable the state government to file an appeal before a division bench of the high court.

The case involves attempts to lure four BRS MLAs to the BJP. It was alleged that the accused offered ₹100 crore to BRS MLA Pilot Rohith Reddy and ₹50 crore to three other party MLAs to switch to the BJP.

The court also quashed GO 62 under which a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was constituted by the BRS government to probe the case. If the order is upheld, the SIT's heat on the alleged accused would dissipate.

The SIT had served notices on BJP general secretary B L Santosh and others to appear before it, on which the court had issued a stay till December 30. It had also issued lookout notices against Kerala doctor Jaggu Swamy and BDJS president Thushar Vellapally.

As for the BRS in the state, entrusting the case to the CBI is a serious setback in its attempt to go after the BJP. Till now the state government was the hunter while the BJP was the hunted. It is not known if the roles would reverse from now on.

Justice B Vijaysen Reddy pronounced the order on the petitions filed by the accused priest Ramchandra Bharati, pontiff Simhayaji and restaurant-owner Nandu Kumar that they did not have faith in the SIT probe. Though BJP leader T Premender Reddy's petition was similar, it was not allowed because the BJP is a third party in the dispute.

Forest dept goes digital to avert man-elephant conflict

B THIPPERUDRAPPA @ Chikkamagaluru

THE Chikkamagaluru division of Forest Department has come up with an innovative plan to avert conflicts between villagers and elephants. It has decided to take the help of technology by installing digital display boards and starting SMS service to caution residents and visitors to Mudigere taluk about the movement of wild elephants.

An Elephant Task Force led by DCFO N E Kranthi, with Mudigere as the headquarters, has been set up. Mudigere MLA MP Kumaraswamy on Saturday officially declared open the service. He released billboards and posters carrying details of the measures being taken by the task force.

Those entering the taluk and its surroundings can reach out to the task force on the contact number 7204004261, which will be displayed on the boards and posters, following which they will start receiving alerts.

The digital display boards will be installed at vulnerable places in Mudigere taluk like Handpost, Baiduvalli, Bhairapura, Gowdahalli, Mekanagadde, Gutti, Chegu, Gonibeedu, Kundur and Gabgal.

Meanwhile, members of the Bhadra Wildlife Conservation Trust DV Girish and S Girijashankar in a statement attributed the rise in man-animal conflicts to the obstruction posed to the path of the migrating elephants as these animals are prone to move in search of food. They also stated that the brewing of illicit liquor in the thick forest of Malnad region was drawing elephants closer to human habitations.